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Mr. Jay Kaufman
ADM
Institutional Health
Ministry of Health

22/8/90

OPEN LETTER

Dear Mr. Kaufman,

RE: environmental sensitivities and psychiatric illness.

Thank you for your encouraging letter of August 17th, just five years after the Thomson report was tabled, and barely more than a year after David Reville, M.P.P. first approached you.

I hope you have passed on to psych hospitals some of the many references to chemical sensitivities causing central nervous system dysfunction. One source is the bibliography from the Health and Welfare publication "Healthy Environments for Canadians", written by Bruce Small, whom Gail Waller may have heard at the conference April 6th in Ottawa. According to page B-167 of Mr. Small's report, the relationship between allergy and mental illness has been written about in medical literature since 1908. Another source is the June 1980 Psychiatric Journal of the University of Ottawa.

Although it inappropriately relates the problem exclusively to immune dysfunction, and therefore presents skewed recommendations for treatment, there is a book published some years ago in Britain called "Not all in the Mind" by a psychiatrist named Mackarness.

Another source is the appendices to the Thomson report which, if your Psychiatrists in Chief can accept the experience of people already diagnosed at least as "anecdotal" evidence, list a number of CNS symptoms described by patients as experienced after exposure to substances they are sensitive to.

(While I can understand the phrase as it is used in science, there is something insidious about referring to the experience of citizens in a democracy or clients going to physicians with complaints as "anecdotal".)

I appreciate that you are sincerely trying to address this concern. There are two important related questions I would like you to answer as best you can...

1) What will the Ministry of Health do to compensate people with sensitivities who have been mistreated by Ontario mental health facilities?

2) As there are many of us who feel Psychiatric hospitals have abused people with sensitivities, what will the Ministry do to guard against the obvious conflict of interest for psychiatrists-in-chief at hospitals which may have abused environmentally sensitive patients? Right now, the foxes are investigating the well-being of the chickens.

In 1986 the Ministry of Health appointed Dr. Barry Zimmerman to investigate Thomson's report. Many of us found this a contravention of democratic principals, in that Dr. Zimmerman was widely known for his "harsh polemic which was preventing a positive consensus from emerging" and his "sheer gobbledygook" on the subject of environmental sensitivities. (Those were the words of a former Dean of Dentistry at U of T who headed a committee on ES in 1985.)

I understand Dr. Zimmerman has been relieved of his duties with the Ministry of Health, but his involvement in this issue has certainly been a factor in sustaining a confused and unhelpful approach. I hope that in the process you carry out concerning psych hospitals you will not repeat the same mistake in leaving the issue to institutions that have demonstrated biased, even bigoted attitudes in the past, and who may, as a result, be in a conflict of interest.

You wouldn't have Phillip Rushton investigating race relations, or someone with a proven record of beating his wife investigating and making recommendations on spousal abuse. I hope the Ministry of Health will end its continuing discriminatory practice of not providing unbiased investigation when it comes to problems related to this group.

There are many of us who feel your psychiatrists-in-chief have a lot to hide, as evidenced by their irresponsible answer to your inquiries on this subject a year ago, and that we will continue to pay the price of protecting their reputations.

Sincerely,



Chris Brown
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cc various interested parties